



## California Sportfishing Protection Alliance

*"An Advocate for Fisheries, Habitat and Water Quality"*

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### COMMENTS Draft Habitat Expansion Plan

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Via e-mail (HEA@water.ca.gov)

Dear Sir(s) or Madam(s):

The California Sportfishing Protection Alliance respectfully submits these comments on the proposed measures on the draft Habitat Expansion Plan that was released in November, 2009.

#### **1. The proposed actions do not mitigate for the loss of the Feather River salmon and steelhead fisheries upstream of Lake Oroville.**

Historically, the Feather River boasted one of the largest salmon and steelhead runs in California's Central Valley. The proposed actions, to either enhance habitat in the Yuba River downstream of a rim dam, or to enhance habitat in two small watersheds (Big Chico and Antelope Creeks) and in a somewhat larger watershed where millions of dollars have already been committed and a project is well underway, does not come close to doing justice to the loss of the upper Feather River anadromous salmonid fisheries.

CSPA has previously commented on the severe inadequacy of the estimated dollar amount of the commitments under the Habitat Expansion Agreement. The goal of creating habitat for 2000-3000 spring-run Chinook is equally penurious. Yet even given these constraints, the proposed projects disregard the extent of the crisis of Central Valley

salmon and steelhead and the extent of the measures that will be needed to turn around the present descent of these species into oblivion.

Over 90% of the historic freshwater habitat for Central Valley salmonids has been blocked by Central Valley rim dams, of which Lake Oroville is the second largest. The reservoir is the storage linchpin of the State Water Project, which supplies water to locations four hundred miles away. The draft HEP now proposes one or perhaps three niche projects, which spruce up few minor fisheries that have not been completely destroyed by water development. The presumption that this can mitigate for blockage of the Feather River and all the added damage done in moving its water around the state is deficient by orders of magnitude.

**2. The proposed actions are not passage projects that will substantially increase the amount and diversity of habitat accessible to spring-run Chinook and Central Valley steelhead.**

In order to recover Central Valley salmon and steelhead, these species need to be re-established upstream of rim dams in every major watershed to which passage has been blocked. The Habitat Expansion Plan should support this approach.

The message that is sent by the projects as proposed in the November draft is that safe, contained, and simple solutions will be sufficient to get the job done. They will not.

Any action undertaken to mitigate the loss of the upper Feather River to anadromous fish absolutely must be a passage project past a major rim dam. If not a mitigation in place, it must at least be a mitigation in kind. A fish ladder on Big Chico Creek, as much as it is needed, is simply inappropriate in the context proposed.

**3. Priority should be given to actions in the Feather River watershed.**

While some reasons have been provided for why hydropower projects on the North Fork Feather make a trap-and-haul program there problematic, we are unaware of good reasons why a trap-and-haul program that would move fish to and from the Middle Fork Feather is not feasible. The presumption should be that this option, which could move fish to over 40 miles of wild and scenic habitat, should be selected unless definitive proof is made that it cannot work. In this regard, it is important to note that the Wild and Scenic River Act does not prohibit structures that are consistent with the values of the Act, such as the promotion of fisheries restoration.

Prioritizing the Middle Fork Feather also fits with the imperative of restoring fish upstream of all major rim dams. It is not simply a question of choosing the best place to start a stand-alone program. It is rather a question of starting at the best time, which is now, and then expanding the first effort throughout the Valley.

**4. The proposed actions seek to improve remnant habitat rather than re-establish substantial habitat that has been lost to dams.**

Improving remnant salmonid habitat fisheries in the Central Valley can at best create boutique fisheries. The appropriate goal is to restore reconnected upper watershed ecosystems, with fish populations that support both extensive sport fisheries and a robust commercial salmon fishery in the ocean.

**5. The proposed actions do not meet the criteria of the HEA because they contemplate actions that should be undertaken as the result of other processes or actions.**

The Yuba actions as proposed in the draft HEP should be addressed under a Biological Opinion for the operation of Englebright and Daguerre Dams. PG&E and others are obligated to complete restoration of Battle Creek, which is also mandated by a Biological Opinion for the Operations and Criteria Plan of the State Water Project and Central Valley Project. As suggested by the November 10, 2009 letter from Steve Edmondson of the National Marine Fisheries Service to Ralph Torres and Randal Livingston, these proposed actions should not be considered eligible for inclusion in the Habitat Expansion Plan, and should be withdrawn from consideration in this context.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft Habitat Expansion Plan.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Chris Shutes", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Chris Shutes  
FERC Projects Director  
California Sportfishing Protection Alliance